

Message Text

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R 120854Z JUL 74

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3109
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L 3882

E O 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IS, MILI

SUBJ: ARI SHARON'S FUTURE: ARMY OR POLITICS?

REF: TEL AVIV 3830

SUMMARY: ISRAELI PRESS REPORTS JULY 11 THAT DISCUSSIONS
RE POSSIBLE RETURN OF CONTROVERSIAL LIKUD LEADER AND FORMER
ARMY GENERAL ARIK SHARON TO ACTIVE MILITARY SERVICE,
WHICH WOULD REQUIRE HIS RESIGNATION FROM KNESSET,
HAVE COLLAPSED. SHARON'S FRUSTRATIONS WITH HIS LIKUD
COLLEAGUES AND HIS AWARENESS OF LIKELIHOOD THAT LIKUD WILL
REMAIN STERILE OPPOSITION FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE DOUBTLESS
FUELED HIS INTEREST IN RETURN TO IDF. BUT SHARON'S REPORTED
DEMAND FOR GUARANTEE THAT HE WOULD BE NEXT IN LINE FOR CHIEF OF
STAFF POST AS WELL AS FOR UNSPECIFIED COMMAND ASSIGNMENT BEYOND
WHAT IDF WAS PREPARED TO OFFER APPARENTLY LED TO BREAKDOWN
OF DISCUSSIONS. HOWEVER, QUESTION OF SHARON'S FUTURE REMAINS
FAR FROM RESOLVED, WITH FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS FOR BOTH
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POLITICAL AND MILITARY AREAS OF ISRAELI PUBLIC LIFE. END SUMMARY.

1. ISRAELI PRESS IN LAST WEEK HAS CARRIED SPATE OF STORIES SPECULATING

ON POSSIBLE RETURN OF CONTROVERSIAL FORMER GOENRAL AND NOW LIKUD LEADER M K ARIEL "ARIK" SHARON TO ACTIVE MILITARY SERVICE IN A MAJOR CAPACITY. UNDER ISRAELI LAW, SHARON WOULD HAVE TO RESIGN HIS KNESSET SEAT AND CEASE ALL POLITICAL ACTIVITY WERE HE TO RETURN TO MILITARY SERVICE, SO THAT ANY SUCH STEP WOULD HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPACT IN BOTH MILITARY AND POLITICAL AREAS.

2. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, RABIN AND PERES AUTHORIZED CHIEF OF STAFF GUR TO DISCUSS WITH SHARON POSSIBILITY OF HIS RETURN TO MILITARY SERVICE. WHILE PRESS ACCOUNTS REFRAINED FROM DISCUSSING ANY SPECIFIC ASSIGNMENT, WE HAVE HEAD FROM ONE INFORMED SOURCE THAT SHARON WANTED NEW POSITION CREATED AS COMMANDER OF THE ARMY. GUR MAY HAVE PROPOSED POSSIBLE RETURN TO SOUTHERN COMMAND WHICH SHARON HAD HELD PREVIOUSLY (PRESENT INCUMBENT MAJOR GENERAL AVRAHAM ADAN IS BEING TRANSFERRED TO WASHINGTON AS MILITARY ATTACHE). PRESS HAS ALSO CLAIMED THAT SHARON WANTED GUARATNEE THAT HE WOULD SUCCEED GUR AS CHIEF OF STAFF, A COMMITMENT WHICH NEITHER RABIN NOR

PERES COULD LEGALLY MAKE.

3. ACCORDING TO UNSIGNED FRONT PAGE STORY DAVAR JULY 11, DISCUSSIONS REGARDING SHARON'S RETURN TO MILITARY SERVICE HAVE COLLAPSED, WITH SHARON DEMANDING A POSITION WHICH GUR IS UNWILLING TO GIVE HIM AND GUR OFFERING SHARON AN ASSIGNMENT WHICH THE LATTER HAS TURNED DOWN. THIS IS NOT NECESSARILY FINAL WORD ON MATTER, OF COURSE, AND IT CANNOT BE EXCLUDED THAT PERES OR EVEN RABIN MIGHT MEET WITH SHARON TO DISCUSS IT FURTHER.

4. ISSUE OF SHARON'S POSSIBLE REINSTATEMENT IN A TOP IDF POST IS REPORTEDLY PART OF OVERALL ATTEMPT TO REVITABLIZE AND REORGANIZED IDF BY BRINGING BACK A NUMBER OF FORMER SENIOR OFFICERS FOR A YEAR OR MORE OF ACTIVE SERVICE. IN SHARON'S CASE, HOWEVER, WE ARE ALSO STRUCK BY SEVERAL UNIQUE CONSIDERATIONS: (A) THAT ARABIN AND SHARON HAD MUTUALLY EFFECTIVE AND WARM RELATIONS DURING FORMER'S TOUR AS COS: (B) THAT SHARON HAS NOT ONLY REFRAINED CONFIDENTIAL

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FROM ANY POLITICAL ATTACK AGAINST RABIN BUT ALSO STOUTLY DEFENDED HIM AGAINST ACCUSATIONS IN RECENTLY PUBLISHED WEIZMAN MEMORANDUM REGARDING RABIN'S ALLEGED BREAKDOWN BEFORE 1967 WAR (TEL AVIV 2362); (C) THAT SHARON HAS SPECIAL BACKGROUND AS CRACK ANTI-TERROR FIGHTER GOING BACK TO EARLY 1950S. BEFORE 1956 WAR, DAYAN HAD ESTABLISHED SPECIAL COMMANDO UNIT "202" UNDER SHARON'S COMMAND TO CARRY OUT REPRISAL RAIDS AGAINST JORDANIAN AND EGYPTIAN FORCES.

5. THIS BACKGROUND PLUS SHARON'S REPUTATION FOR DARING MILITARY PLANNING COULD INDEED HAVE SIGNIFICANCE IN CONTEXT OF IDF'S PRESENT ANTI-TERROR ACTIVITIES. HOWEVER, RABIN AND PERES WOULD RETAIN FINAL SAY IN ANY CASE IN AUTHORIZATION OF SPECIFIC ANTI-TERROR OPERATIONS.

6. ON POLITICAL FRONT, SHARON'S DEPARTURE FROM LIKUD, IF IT OCCURRED, WOULD DEPRIVE MAJOR OPPOSITION FORCE OF ONE OF ITS MOST POPULAR FIGURES. RELATIONS BETWEEN SHARON AND HIS LIKUD COLLEAGUES HAVE DETERIORATED NOTABLY IN RECENT MONTHS. SHARON'S PROPOSAL TO UNITE LIKUD BY CANCELLING SEPRATE PARTY ORGANIZATIONS HAS PROVED TO BE NON-STARTER. SHARON HAS ALIENATED LEADERS OF HIS OWN LIBERAL PARTY BY HIS PUBLIC ASPERSIONS ON THEIR ABILITIES AND CALLS FOR A YOUNGER LEADERSHIP. IN POLITICAL VIEWS, PARTICULARLY ON SUCH ISSUES AS DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENTS AND FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS, SHARON HAS MOVED VERY CLOSE TO HARDLINE POSITION OF HERUT LEADER BEGIN WITH WHOM HE IS ON VERY GOOD TERMS.

7. POLITICAL EFFECT OF SHARON'S DEPARTURE FROM POLITICS IF IT OCCURRED WOULD PROBABLY BE TWO FOLD: (A) TO WEAKEN FURTHER LIKUD'S STANDING WITH GENERAL PUBLIC, CORRESPONDINGLY STRENGTHENING THAT OF LABOR ALIGNMENT AND (B) STRENGTHEN DOOMINATON OF BEGIN AND INTENSIFY FRUSTRATION OF OTHER LIKUD LEADERS TAMIR, RIMALT, AND HOROWITZ.

8. AS TO SHARON HIMSELF, WE BELIEVED FROM OUTSET THAT HE WOULD BE DISSATISFIED WITH ROLE OF OPPOSITION MK. LIKUD IS PRESENTLY FROZEN INTO POSITION OF STREILE OPPOSITION FORCE WITH LITTL E CHANCE OF COMING TO POWER. MOREOVER RECENT EFFORT TO CREATE OPPOSITION BLOC OF LIKUD AND RELIGIOUS FORCES ALSO HAS NOT WORKED OUT. NOR HAS SHARON FOUND WAY TO TAKE CONTROL OF LIKUD AWAY FROM BEGIN. IN THIS CONTEXT, WE BELIEVE THAT SHARON WILL
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REMAIN INTERESTED IN OVERTURES TO REJOIN ARMY EVEN IF
PRESENT DISCUSSIONS AS SUGGESTED BY PRESS HAVE INDEED COLLAPSED.
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